



ORMSKIRK & WEST LANCASHIRE NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

'LOCKDOWN' NEWSLETTER

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What have you all been up to? Any chat, photos, news, recent acquisitions etc. by members for future issues please!

MEETINGS TO START IN APRIL!

DESPITE RECENT MISGIVINGS about starting meetings again a new survey of members now indicates that the overwhelming majority would like meetings to resume in April.

This follows the Government's announcement that restrictions will be cancelled at the end of this month as the rate of infection appears to be slowing and, with most people now fully vaccinated, the severity of the virus seems to be less. It's exactly two years since we enjoyed the last face to face meeting at the *Eagle & Child* – then the first 'Lockdown' kicked in and all meetings had to be abandoned. It was then that our member Lee Brown suggested a monthly newsletter might help keep the Society together during these difficult times. It seems to have worked!

Sadly, a number of other regional societies have not been quite so lucky and have been forced to close their doors for the last time. Conversely, the Crew Coin & Medal Society has gone from strength to strength during this period and now boasts a really healthy membership.



A nostalgic reminder: Our meeting room at the Eagle & Child

We still have an unfinished programme of meetings from two years ago and this now needs to be re-organised to fit the remainder of this year. As things stand at the moment the first resumed meeting will be held in our usual upstairs private meeting room at the *Eagle & Child* Bispham Green, near Parbold, on **Thursday 7th April 2022** starting at 8.15 pm. Nothing is yet planned for the evening but it would be an ideal opportunity for members to show any interesting acquisitions they have made over the past two years. All members will be informed by phone or email if there should be any last minute changes to the proposed meeting. I look forward to seeing you all again.

THE F.A. CUP ON A COIN

Not only is the Platinum Jubilee being rightly celebrated and commemorated this year but also the 150th anniversary of football's famous F.A. Cup competition, which began in 1872. A special issue of a new £2 piece has been designed by Mathew Dent and Christian Davies. The coin was released for sale on 14th February and is available from The Royal Mint. Quite fittingly, the design



on the reverse features the cup itself as the main element and overall the image is well balanced as it spans the bi-metallic flan. The cup's trailing ribbons bear the dates 1871/2 and 2021/2 with the wording 'The Football Association Challenge Cup' in the centre of the image. The coin's outer legend reads 'Celebrating 150 years of the FA Cup'. On 14th May this year a suitable example will be used for the coin toss at the start of the 150th anniversary match at Wembley Stadium.

FRENCH ASSIGNAT NOTES

Bad political management and excesses of all sorts meant that by 1788 France was on the verge of bankruptcy and coinage itself was becoming scarce. Following the move made by England's Henry VIII 250 years earlier in 1789 the new Revolutionary Government tried to raise money by confiscating land and valuables belonging to the Catholic Church. But such assets took time to be turned into cash, so an early form of 'promissory note' was issued – to be used instead of coin.



Assignat note for 50 sols, dated May 23rd 1793 (left)

Obverse and reverse of a one centime bronze coin of the period (right). The coin is dated year 6 (1799) of the new calendar, which was finally abandoned in 1805.



These notes were known as '*the scrip*' or more commonly '*assignats*' as they were to be eventually drawn on the 'assigned' fund created by the sale of church land. The notes were issued in various denominations the 50 sols note showing two allegorical female figures representing justice with a tablet inscribed (in French) '*The Rights of Man*'. This design of note was issued the year Louis XVI went to the guillotine. Then some really bright spark had the idea of also confiscating the land and property of the now toppled aristocracy. Except with the church now penniless and the aristocracy either beheaded or in exile there was nobody left to buy the property and realise the much needed cash. So the Government simply issued even more *assignats* – but unlike the 20th century German inflation money there were no ridiculously high denominations. The value of the new notes was supposed to be guaranteed by Government – but was wildly over issued. This resulted in a severe drop in value, so much so that they ended up worth less than the paper they were printed on. The Revolutionary Council abandoned the note issue in February 1796 when the printing plates and the remaining notes were publicly burned.

By the middle of 1794 *assignats* outstanding had risen to 7,200,000,000. The Revolutionary Council had already introduced the death penalty for forgery and went on to make it a capital offence if *assignats* were even refused in commerce or even to ask how a transaction was to be paid carried the death penalty. This was the so-called Reign of Terror. England, being ever vigilant for an opportunity to have a go at France, saw an opportunity and flooded the French economy with counterfeit notes – just to make things worse and hopefully topple the Revolutionary Government. By the summer of 1795 there were over 20,000,000,000 *assignats* in circulation and their value had dropped to less than 8/10 of 1 percent. Even the workers who printed them went on strike. This was eventually settled by offering them a loaf of bread every day instead of money (which would have been paid in *assignats*).

The new denomination of the franc was introduced at this time but didn't fare any better, as inflation had really taken hold and faith in paper money simply plummeted. Napoleon Bonaparte was given the task of coming up with funds for a new 'metallic coinage'. He did this by requisitioning every silver and gold coin he found during his invasion of Italy. In doing this priceless art treasures were also looted from the Vatican and in all over 53,000,000 francs worth of treasure was shipped back to France. By 1797 hard cash began to return to circulation and in the early years of the 19th century France had a full coin economy again. The Revolutionary Calendar which had assigned the year 1793 as *year 1* was abandoned in favour of the internationally recognised *Gregorian* calendar. The rest is history.

DE LA RUE BANKNOTE CRISIS

Banknote printer De La Rue has warned of supply chain issues caused by the pandemic. It warned that higher costs of raw materials and microchips, coupled with higher staff absences, is starting to affect the company's performance in producing banknotes. The UK based company prints banknotes for over 140 central banks and employs more than 2,500 people globally. De La Rue previously held the contract to manufacture British passports, but lost it to the Franco-Dutch firm Gemalto in 2018. All current Bank of England notes are printed by De La Rue at its site in Debden, Essex. It began printing banknotes back in 1860, at first for the



island of Mauritius and then elsewhere. Today it produces enough notes each week, that if stacked up, would reach the peak of Everest twice. It remains to be seen if this productivity can continue.

COIN QUIZ No.23

QUESTION 1. Where is the annual 'Trial of the Pyx' held?

QUESTION 2. Why was the infamous 'Window Tax' introduced in 1695?

QUESTION 3. Why were the so-called 'Voce Populi' coins or tokens, struck in Dublin in 1760, issued?

QUESTION 4. What are 'Tankahs' and who introduced them?

QUESTION 5. What is a Northumbrian 'Styca'?

QUESTION 6. Why are copper or bronze West African 'Manillas' so called?

QUESTION 7. The 'Mark' was an English unit of account – for how much?

QUESTION 8. What is the origin of the dollar (\$) symbol?

ANSWERS (Quiz No.22)

Q1. Fiddler's Money was small silver coins given to a minstrel by those attending country wakes and other festivals.

Q2. A term sometimes applied to Roman coins to denote money of necessity, such as the legionary denarius of Mark Antony.

Q3. The Runic alphabet originated in Scandinavia but the word 'Runic' is Icelandic and roughly translated means a mystery or secret.

Q4. The 'Rosa Americana' coins were struck under royal patent by William Wood during the reign of George I.

Q5. The famous 'Una and the Lion' £5 piece was designed and engraved by William Wyon.

Q6. The term 'rouleau' refers to a pile of coins of the same denomination, wrapped in a roll of paper.

Q7. 'Jugate' means two or more heads joined together or overlapping, as on coins of William III and Mary.

Q8. The Dorrien & Mogens shilling issue of 1798 was ordered to be melted down as no royal proclamation had sanctioned their production.

Q9. The famous engraver is Leonard Charles Wyon (1826-1891), who was the son of William Wyon. He designed and engraved the new bronze coinage of 1860 and the 1887 Jubilee coinage.



QUESTION 9.
Can you name this famous numismatist?



USELESS COIN FACTS No. 23

Not exactly coins this time, but Parmesan cheese has been used for financial transactions and deals at least since the Middle Ages. Unbelievably, it is still used as collateral for certain bank loans, due to both its value and the fact that each 'wheel' of cheese takes years to mature. This means it serves as sound collateral for Italian financiers.

The after effects of World War II meant Italy was faced with a devastating recession. However, this unusual form of security helped keep the Italian cheesemakers' businesses afloat during this harsh economic period. In fact the Credito Emiliano Bank reputedly still has two climate-controlled warehouses that hold roughly 440,000 wheels of cheese with a retail value of over £138 million. I wonder if they have as many biscuits?

SPORTING NUMISMATICS?

Coming across a cartoon featuring a numismatist is a pretty rare occurrence, yet our newest member Martin Perry, gleaned this one from a 1933 copy of *Punch* magazine.



A distinguished numismatist on holiday honours the local village club by showing the first ha'penny in the inter-county match.

DOUBLE YOUR MONEY

The name *Piedfort* is applied by numismatists to describe coins specially struck on very thick flans as presentation pieces or as collectors' items. It derives from the French language and means 'heavy measure' or 'heavy foot'. In twelfth century France they were used by reigning monarchs as rewards for loyalty or gifts to foreign ambassadors. With the English monarchy at this time being mostly of Norman decent they naturally continued the tradition. Edward I is known to have issued extra thick silver pennies for this purpose.

There is a theory that, in France, since minting coins was not a centralised activity in medieval times, it is thought that Piedforts could have been distributed to different mints in order to show them what to copy for the standard coinage. Although this theory could hardly apply to England at this time, as die making in most cases was strictly controlled by the hereditary FitzOtho family in London. Making these show pieces deliberately thick meant they were not likely to be unintentionally mixed with ordinary coins. The production of Piedforts died out in sixteenth century Britain but the tradition survived in France for at least another 150 years. The trend continued across Europe in the following two centuries, as much thicker than normal coins were also produced. It would seem that this practice had become an established courtly exercise.



Two modern commemorative Piedforts; The ever elusive Kew Gardens 50p piece (left) and the highly collectable 2014 gold sovereign (right)

The illustrations are not to scale



After the decline of this mostly European tradition in the 18th C, the resumed striking of modern Piedforts began at the *Monnaie de Paris* in the 1890s, partly in answer to demands from collectors at that time. The financial effects of two world wars, leaving the gold standard and abandoning silver coinage, meant that Britain did not produce Piedforts again until 1982, when it sold a decimal 20p Piedfort to the public. Since 1982 the Royal Mint has continued to strike limited editions of Piedfort coins in sterling silver to premier Proof standard to commemorate special anniversaries or a new design. Marketed as limited editions and sold for many times their face value, they are mostly of interest to souvenir collectors, as opposed to serious coin collectors. Most of the UK's modern Piedforts are made in silver, gold, or platinum. In keeping with the earliest Piedforts they are still usually double the normal in both thickness and weight but some are only about 50% thicker and heavier than the normal circulated coins. Most are now issued as proof coins, to emphasise their craftsmanship.

A TALE OF TWO BECKERS

Alan Dawson

The name Becker in numismatic terms is almost synonymous with skilful forgery. Back in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, coin collecting was considered the hobby of royalty and the elite. With such a goldmine to be tapped there were certain dealers whose livelihood depended on filling the wants lists of such royal collectors. Numismatic suppliers of the day were firms such as Rothschild in Frankfurt, William Foster in London and Mionnet in Paris.

A certain Herr Carl Wilhelm Becker (1772-1830), sometimes of Munich and elsewhere, supplied ancient Greek, Roman and Medieval coins to kings, princes, counts and national museums. He also sold many fine specimens to prominent numismatists of the day. The problem was that they were all of his own manufacture. That Carl Becker was a skilful artist cannot be disputed. He prepared his dies and subsequent coins in an era that preceded the modern means of mechanical reproduction. Becker cut his dies by hand, copying them from genuine pieces which either passed through his studio or else were viewed in museums or collections he studied. Becker did not start out his business career as a forger; he had inherited his father's flourishing wine business. But when this failed he became a draper, but this second enterprise met with the same fate.



Two prolific forgers:

Carl Wilhelm Becker 1772-1830 (left) and Charles 'Scratch' Becker, 1847-1916 (right). Carl Becker is shown in a pompous commissioned self-portrait, whereas Charles Becker's image is an official US police mugshot, prior to his imprisonment.



He had always harboured an ambition to be a sculptor and was lucky enough to be taken on as a student engraver at the Royal Mint of Bavaria in Munich. Years later, when asked why he turned his interest in numismatics and his talents to making imitations of ancient coins, he referred to an incident which happened shortly after he joined the mint. A wealthy Bavarian baron, with whom he had become friendly, sold him a rare gold coin of Commodus. Later he discovered that the coin was in fact a fake. Becker returned the coin to the baron, only to be chastised by the baron for meddling in an area he didn't understand – and did not get his money back. Becker got his revenge by in turn creating a superb false piece which he sold to the baron! And so began his career in coin forgery. He simply carried on creating copies in his spare time and selling them to notables throughout Europe. Becker kept meticulous records of the 340 plus coins and medals he copied. Audaciously, he once even ventured to Vienna to offer to sell his dies to the emperor. *"How else could anyone detect my false coins without comparing them to my dies?"* Becker once asked. In 1911, 81 years after Becker's death his dies were bought by the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin and soft metal impressions were made and distributed to all the prominent museums in Europe as a way of detecting which coins in their collections were 'Beckers'. Today Becker counterfeits are very much collected and have even gained a certain respectability. Yet it is suspected that many unrecorded and undetected Becker copies still sit in major collections throughout the world.

The second of the infamous 'Beckers' was a man who was known by the name of Charles 'Scratch' Becker (1847-1916). This Becker was the plague of government authorities on both sides of the Atlantic. Whereas Carl Becker had concentrated on ancient coins – Charles Becker was a forger of banknotes. Both these Beckers learned their engraving skills in Germany and both were expert enough to fool most experts of their day. William Pinkerton, son of the founder of the famous American detective agency gave Charles Becker a compliment when he said *"A bogus banknote drawn by Becker's steady hand could undergo microscopic scrutiny yet still remain undetected."* It was Becker's steady hand when engraving fine lines which had earned him the nickname of 'Scratch'.

In 1872 Becker's activities abroad landed him with a prison term in Turkey, where he had been caught distributing false Turkish banknotes. However he escaped the Turkish prison and went on the run throughout Europe – funding his way by forging notes of whichever country he happened to pass through. By 1877 his activities had again landed him in jail, this time in France, for forging French 1,000 franc notes. His final incarceration was in San Quentin, USA for producing bogus U.S. treasury notes. He was finally released in 1903 and vowed to mend his ways and spent his last years running a bar in Brooklyn, New York, regaling patrons who would listen with tales of his past yet colourful exploits.

THE CHIHUAHUA MINT OF MEXICO

Eric Hodge

This coin is a cast 8 reales, dated 1812, from the Chihuahua mint in Mexico. Chihuahua was a temporary Royalist mint set up by a decree of 8th October 1810 during the War of Independence against Spain which lasted from 1810 to 1821. The war in reality was a revolution against Spain for the establishment of an independent Mexico. The exact time of the beginning of the War of Independence was at 5 am, on the 16th September 1810 when Father Miguel Hidalgo rang his church bells and called to his people to fight.



The only coins issued at Chihuahua were 8 reales, and when the mint was first established coins were cast, due to lack of adequate machinery, from 1810 to 1813 and then struck (generally over previously cast coins) between 1813 and 1822. The cast coins were based on original 8 reales of Mexico City as patterns, (as all have the square and circle marking on the edge, similar to that of coins struck by the Mexico City mint) but apparently care was exercised to eradicate the M mint mark on the reverse and substitute capital CA for Chihuahua mint. The assayers' initials were also altered to RP though no records have been found to indicate who these stood for. The City of Chihuahua was founded as a mission on the 15th August 1639. Between 1705 and 1708 rich gold and silver deposits were discovered in the vicinity.



Obverse and reverse of a countermarked Chihuahua mint 8 reales

Besides having the unmistakable cast appearance and the crudely outlined CA and RP these coins also have two countermarks placed on the obverse, on the left of the king's portrait a T designating receipt by the Royal Treasurer and on the right crowned pillars of Hercules with pomegranate beneath, a symbol used by the comptrollers of the Real Hacienda to whom these pieces were turned over from the foundry room. These countermarks were placed with hand punches, after each piece had been checked for weight, the lighter coins being discarded and the heavier filed down. This particular coin is heavy at 29.22 grams, so was lucky not to be filed down.

The main reason for my interest in the coin is the obverse Scottish countermark of Rothsay Cotton Works around 4/6 over 1820. On the reverse can be seen the privy punch mark below and slightly to the right of the reverse shield (between the N and D of IND) designating the validity of this Scottish mark.

JANUARY YORK COIN FAIR REVIEW

It isn't really surprising that the January York Coin and Stamp Fair was poorly attended by both public and dealers. Understandably, with the Covid pandemic still raging, the Fair's organizers had placed fairly stringent restrictions on entry to the Fair. These included positive proof of full triple vaccination and the requirement to wear masks at all times.

Apparently those dealers who did attend reported reasonable trade from a few of the die-hard collectors who did brave the journey and the closed environment of the Fair. Compared with previous years' events it was not a success. Let's hope the summer event will be back to normal.

THE FAMOUS BEAWORTH HOARD

On the 30th June 1833, in a field known as the 'Old Litten' at Beaworth near Winchester, a leaden chest or cylinder was discovered buried quite near the surface on a rough track way.

The container revealed carefully packed rolls of silver pennies from the reign of William the Conqueror. In all the contents of the hoard were thought by Ridding to number between 8,000 and 9,000 coins, although only 6,282 were recorded. Many of the coins were dispersed amongst the finders and Hawkins speculated that there could have originally been as many as 12,000. The chest, which had originally been bound with iron showed every indication that it had been constructed specially to house the coins. The period of issue of the coinages represented spanned about 12 years, ceasing with the death of the king in 1087. According to Ridding in his *Annals of the Coinage* most specimens were as fresh as when they came from the die. Specimens from nearly every county in England were present, and all were full weight and of pure silver.

It has been suggested that the money was either destined for, or came from, the Royal Treasury, only 6 miles away at Winchester. They could well have represented samples having passed through the Exchequer tests held half-yearly in Winchester. This would account for the extended sphere of its gathering ground as the sheriffs would bring the currency of every mint to the Exchequer, not only for testing but as revenue payments. It was well known that the coffers of the Royal Treasury contained generally the best quality coins. If we accept that this hoard was indeed connected with the Royal Treasury then there is a fairly convincing explanation in a passage from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

"1087. William II went to Winchester and inspected the Treasury and the riches which his father had before gathered; it was not to be estimated by any man how much was there gathered in gold and in silver, and in vessels, and in robes, and in gems, and in many other precious things which are difficult to recount. The new king then did as his father had commanded him ere he died: he distributed the treasures for his father's soul to every monastery that was in England; to some he gave ten marks of gold and to others he gave but six."

Presumably the archbishops of Canterbury and York received ten marks and the other bishoprics and abbeys six. A mark of silver and of gold was only a unit of account, represented by 160 silver pennies, which was two-thirds of a pound Stirling, or approximately 250g. weight. A mark of gold, by weight, on the other hand was valued at 1,440 pennies. Which means that six marks of gold would convincingly tally with the 'eight thousand to nine thousand pennies' found at Beaworth. The See at Winchester, one of the principal bishoprics, would have received its due share and indeed entries in the *Annals of Winchester* raise a suspicion that the hoard was in fact the Conqueror's actual bequest to that church intact. The land on which the hoard was found belonged to the Bishop of Winchester and there had originally been a 'hall or palace' there at the time the hoard was concealed.



William I 'PAXS' type penny by the moneyer Siword of Winchester

In the year 1190 William Rufus was busy demanding 'loans' from all the great ecclesiastical houses for the purpose of paying bribes to the King of France and others. It was further recorded in the *Annals of Winchester* that *"the king carried off a large treasure from the Church of Winchester."* It is possible that the Bishop deliberately removed the Conqueror's bequest from the Treasury to one of his own residences – Beaworth – before William Rufus's men could lay hands on it and had it buried for safekeeping. We'll never know the true story behind the hoard. The makeup of which comprised a few specimens from William I type 5, 6 and 7 – but the bulk of the hoard consisted of type 8 – the familiar 'PAXS' type. Prior to the discovery at Beaworth PAXS pennies had been regarded as one of the rarer issues of William I but with the amount that flooded onto the collectors market after the hoard had largely been dispersed they became by far the commonest type. Of course since 1833 other hoards containing PAXS pennies have been discovered and there has been a large number of single finds, mainly due to metal detectorists. It is however still considered that many of the really good quality specimens, especially those in the British Museum Collection, are actually 'Beaworth' coins.

SHORT CHANGED IN WALES ?

Alan Dawson

A few years ago a medieval coin group comprising nine silver coins, pennies and cut fractions, was discovered near Bronington, North Wales, by metal detectorists. The medieval silver pennies, cut halfpennies and a cut quarter or farthing, were all minted between 1247 and 1265 during the reign of Henry III.



The Bronington find; 6 whole pennies, 2 cut halves and a cut quarter

The presence of cut fractions is certainly indicative that this group was originally the contents of a purse, lost or possibly intentionally hidden and never recovered, or stolen. Wrexham County Borough Museum & Archives expressed interest in acquiring the coins for its collection, following their independent valuation by the Treasure Valuation Committee. Alastair Willis, Senior Curator of Numismatics and the Welsh Economy at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales said: "At eight pence, the contents of this purse may have amounted to roughly 3 days' pay for a skilled tradesman. The 13th century saw the widespread use of coins both in England and along the north and south coasts of Wales and in the Welsh Marches." He then added "The contents of purses give us important information about individuals' wealth and improves our understanding of the local economy. This is one of several medieval treasure finds reported from the Bronington area, including a coin hoard dating to the 15th century". It was obviously a busy area in later medieval times.

Unfortunately, the 13th century monetary value the museum assigned to this find is not quite accurate. As cut halves were reduced in value to a third of a penny in Wales (see front page article in December 2021 issue of *Lockdown Newsletter*) therefore, bearing this in mind, the total would only add up to 6 5/6 pence. How the museum arrived at a total of eight pence is a mystery, as even taking the fractions at their English face value the group would still only make a total 7 1/4 pence – or is this just me being pedantic?

A FLIPPIN' GOOD COIN PROJECT

This may seem unlikely but it has recently been scientifically proven that the age old 'coin flip' used as a decision maker may not be as random as always thought. A university team has analysed the natural process of flipping a coin which is caught in the hand, which proved that vigorously-flipped coins are biased to come up the same way they started. The amount of bias depended on a single parameter, the angle between the normal to the coin and the angular momentum vector. Measurements of this parameter, based on high-speed photography, reported that for natural flips the chance of the coin coming up as started was about 51%. It's hardly good gambling odds but still quite interesting even if a gross waste of university time.

TIME TO ACCEPT THE NEW PRICES

Nobody can have failed to notice that since the start of the pandemic and associated government restrictions the price of coins, across the board, has risen dramatically. It seems largely down to supply and demand, as the two periods of lockdown seemed to have rekindled an interest in collecting generally. Add to the mix the fact that no fresh coins were coming into the UK from abroad plus international buyers have been scouring the internet for possible investment items and, with bank interest rates at an all time low, coins must seem a fairly safe bet. Unfortunately, it's time to abandon previously held ideas of value tempered by scarcity and quality and try to accept this new norm.

The next issue will be in early APRIL 2022 which being the 24th issue will round off exactly two years since the first of these monthly newsletters appeared. Let's hope it's the last!